# DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 149 340 CS 203 847

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TITLE Language Arts "B" Option.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 11p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Advanced Programs; *Creative Writing; Curriculum; *English Curriculum; Junior High Schools; *Language Arts; *Literature; *Literature Appreciation; *Remedial Reading; Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a complete junior high school language arts curriculum and presents in detail two of the suggested courses, creative writing (advanced students) and literary appreciation (remedial students). The rationale is given for each course, along with the objectives, scope, and sequence. Units contain several sample lesson plans, varied teaching techniques, and suggested methods of evaluation. A bibliography of the sources used in each unit is included. (MAI)

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# LANGUAGE ARTS "B" OPTION

Tom Gee

The following subjects are suggested as possible areas for junior high school Language Arts "B" Options:[1]

A. Creative Writing (Advanced students)

B. Literary Appreciation (Remedial students)

C. Canadian Literature and/or Native Canadian Literature

D. Poetics/Linguistics (Advanced students)

E. School Newspaper Publication (Small Group)/Yearbook Publication/Journalism

F. Mythology, Legend and Fable

G. Media Messages (Advertising, Radio/TV, Film Study, Slide/tape presentations, etc.)

H. Science Fiction (or Mystery/Adventure, Western, Gothic, etc.)

I. Dramatic/Public Speaking, Debate, Parliamentary Procedure.

J. The Bible as Literature

K. Humour in Literature

L. Songs Around the World

M. Library Science

N. Creative Dramatics

## A. CREATIVE WRITING

Rationale:

Creative writing, as the term is used in the context of this unit, means student writing of articles, stories, and poems based principally on the individual's own *experience*. Writing from experience appears to be the key to the production of creative writing of quality. Experience provides incidents (plot), setting and characters, all the elements necessary to the construction of a narrative. (Stories attempting the conscious incorporation of theme, the occassional fourth element of a narrative, should not ordinarily be attempted at junior high level.)

To this end, topics are not usually assigned. Rather, students *discuss* their experiences first: incidents they remember from their past, places where these incidents occurred, other people who were involved. They

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discuss how the incidents particularly affected them, why a scene sticks in their memory, and what others said and did and how they looked.

Teachers, too, should join in, recounting experiences they have had. Short stories, poems and excerpts by professional and student writers might also be read to the class to promote recall and discussion of similar incidents, settings, or characters which the students might have experienced. Having spent some time recalling and discussing experiences, students should be ready to write articles, stories, or poems about these experiences.

Upon receipt of first drafts, teachers should act not as marker/evaluator but as editor/mentor, commending strengths and suggesting improvements on individual papers. (Due to the one-to-one nature of this approach, much excellent composition teaching may occur at this point, but it is recommended that class sizes of creative writing options be maintained at approximately twenty students maximum to facilitate this.) Some initial drafts might be read to the class for example or comment. A teacher might read his/hers - hopefully, the teacher will be setting the example of writing along with the class. Finally, polished selections might be posted on a creative writing bulletin board, submitted to the local newspaper, school yearbook and to the many contests open to such work. Publication in professional magazines and journals or publication of a school anthology of creative writing might also be attempted.

Objectives:

General:

1. In recognizing a freer than usual classroom atmosphere, to express in writing personal experiences, feelings, ideas and emotions to a sympathetic teacher and peer group.

2. To experience the "fun" inherent in writing from their own resources in an unrestricted atmosphere.

3. To experience the personal satisfaction of seeing their own writing in print, and to experience a more realistic application of writing as it is used beyond the classroom.

4. To develop an awareness and appreciation of the artistry of well-written literature.

5. To recognize various forms of poetry and prose, especially those forms not emphasized in the junior high Language Arts core.

Specific:

1. To discuss individual experience preparatory to writing about it as exposition (articles), narration (stories), or description (poems).
2. To read and discuss writing (articles, stories, poems) illustrating the experiences of others.
3. To write articles, stories and poems based largely on personal experience.
4. To improve writing skills through discussion based on the writing in No. 3 above.
5. To publish student writing as much as possible.

Scope:

A. Short Story: minimum of one or two based on experience.

B. Article: minimum of one or two based on experience and interest.

C. Poetry: minimum of one lyric and one narrative following experimentation with short restrictive forms such as haiku, tanka, cinquain, limerick, etc.

References:


Carlsen, R. *Sparkling Words: 225 Practical & Creative Writing Ideas*, NCTE, 1965, 1973.

Fritch, J. ed. *Alberta Poetry Year Book*, Edmonton Branch CAA.

Gee. T. *Creative Writing In High School: A Workshop Package*, Regional Office of Education, Grande Prairie, 1976.

--- "Academic Option: Creative Writing," *Alberta English '70*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Summer 1970, p. 33.

--- ed. *How Can A Song Be Blue: An Anthology of Verse by the Students of Alberta*, Alberta English Council, ATA, 1973.

References (cont'd)

Gee, T. ed. *A Nickel's Worth of Wishing: An Anthology of Short Stories by the Students of Alberta*, Alberta English Council, ATA, 1974.

Langdon, M. *Let The Children Write*, Longman, 1961.

West, W. ed. *On Writing By Writers*, Ginn & Co., 1966.

*Alberta Authors Bulletin*, Film & Literary Arts, Alberta Culture, quart.

*Award Stories*, Student Writing Contest, Canada Permanent Trust, Toronto.

*Canadian Writers Guide*, CAA, Fitzhenry & Whiteside, Toronto.

Sample
Lesson 1: To discuss individual experience preparatory to writing about it.

Suggested Activities:

(a) Show videotape: "The Day I Sold Lingerie," W.O. Mitchell (or another of Mitchell's stories of his childhood on videotape available from ACCESS).

(b) Elicit[3] class discussion of various projects they have undertaken as younger children during their summers, ie. building a fort or a go-cart, selling lemonade on the front lawn, camping out overnight, etc.

Establish what happened (incidents), where it happened (setting), who was involved (characters), why it was exciting, moving, memorable, etc.

or

(a) Read to the class an exerpt such as Stegner's "The Dump Ground" (*Prose For Discussion*, Buxton.)

(b) Elicit[3] class discussion about trips to the dump: what it looked like; how it smelled; what sounds were heard; what they did there; who they went with.

or

(a) Select a story, film, etc. which reminds you, the teacher, of a childhood experience which you feel some of the students will have experienced also. Present it to the class.

(b) Elicit[3] discussion on this topic - what? where? who?

(c) Have students begin writing a story or poem about one of their childhood experiences.

Sample Lesson 2: To improve writing skills; specifically, sequencing, description, conflict and point of view.

(a) Have students reexamine their writing from Lesson No. 1 to establish: what happened (incidents), where and when it happened (setting), and who was involved (characters);[4].

(i) Have they established some sort of antecedent action and sequencing to a climax?

(ii) Has the setting description considered more than one of the five senses? (The writing may have developed only the setting and might best take the form of lyric poetry, therefore.)

(iii) Has some conflict between characters or between a character and his condition been established - conflict is the essential ingredient of a narrative; if it isn't present, the writing may be considered as an article or prose passage.

(iv) What is the point of view or "voice" of the narrator, and what is the tense of the story? What would happen if these were changed?

(b) Rewrite to add missed or inadequately developed areas. Teachers dealing with each aspect separately may want to encourage a revision after each.

(c) Some students may want to share their writing orally or via opaque projector. This can be accomplished as a class or in small groups. A teacher might also share his/her writing - a caution is necessary in this regard to avoid discouraging students who aspire to do as well as the teacher.

Sample Lesson 3: To continue improvement of writing skills and ultimately publish some selections.

(a) By this point, which may have required more than three periods, some students may be ready to submit a piece of writing for teacher reaction. While the majority of the class continues their re-writing, the teacher may wish to read some selections to suggest, first of all, strengths, and, secondly, areas for improvement.

(b) By continuing in this fashion, while some students are developing their first draft and others are obtaining editorial comment from the teacher, still others are re-writing to incorporate teacher/editor suggestions. The teacher's editing load, if not reduced, is at least kept evenly distributed. As students gain expertise, an editorial board of students might be established to assess, suggest improvement upon and select pieces for further polishing and ultimate publication.

Evaluation:

A preferred practice requires that the teacher, as editor, *not* grade a selection until the student is ready to submit it for grading. This occurs after the student has had an opportunity to improve the selection based on one or two editing sessions with the teacher.

Also, if a file folder of writing is maintained by each student, a student can then select the one or two pieces each grading period which he/she feels are the best. In this manner, both marks and resulting motivation usually improve dramatically.

Finally, if a student has had accepted for publication in a magazine, newspaper, yearbook, etc. a selection, then that selection/student should likely receive a high evaluation. Similarly, if a student submits to a writing contest a piece of writing which is judged meritorious, then it/he should receive meritorious evaluation from the teacher.

B. LITERARY APPRECIATION

Rationale:

Many students who display weaknesses in the regular language arts program do not ordinarily opt for a language arts option demanding better than average independent reading and language usage skills. The Literary Appreciation option is designed to accommodate these students, to advance their language skills while at the same time demonstrating the pleasures in-

herent in reading good stories, an experience many such students have not had. To this end, the emphasis of the course is on the teacher's reading novels to the students from which they will derive pleasure. Part of each class or week whould be devoted also to independent reading of novels from library resources or elsewhere selected by the individual in consultation with the teacher, and part of the course would be used in discussion of both the oral and independent readings.

Being read to not only increases a child's own reading comprehension, it increases his writing ability as well. First, however, a child discovers there is *entertainment* in books, something that is not learned through the halting laborious reading of the child himself. To him, it is merely hard work. But in the hands, and voice, of an eloquent teacher, the oral reading of interesting, exciting stories introduces the child, whatever his age, to the vicarious thrill of a story's adventure, a story at the child's interest level although likely above his independent reading level. Once this source of entertainment is recognized - and it may take several years of successive teachers reading to the student to implant this conviction - then the student will begin to seek out this entertainment for himself, and the school's job insofar as teaching reading is concerned will be finished. The reader, himself, will take over the process.

As well as showing students the entertainment value of stories however, reading to students brings several other more immediate skills to bear. For example, before the teacher begins the chapter, a student may be called upon to summarize the preceding day's, or week's, chapters to "bring everyone up to date." Thus, a *recall* lesson is instituted for those specific students who the teacher feels need it. During these five-minute recall sessions, previously identified students can be involved in using language in an oral mode in a more-than-usually controlled setting, thereby allowing the teacher to assess the level of a specific child's oral language development for use in planning subsequent oral language lessons. In fact, considerable *vocabulary development* can occur during the readings merely by the teacher's stopping occasionally to ask about the meaning of a word and discussing it in context.

Third, by the teacher's asking the occasional question about who is involved at the moment, or where a particular incident is occurring, or even what is occurring, *comprehension,* as well as that tenuous visualizing

of the "mind's eye," is developed. Most of the preceding generation had this developed for them through listening to the Lone Ranger on radio - the cottonwood grove, the campfire, the bad guys in the shadows - but the television generation has it all visualized for them. This visualizing facility appears to be greatly underdeveloped in many student readers today.

A fourth benefit of the teacher's reading to students is that a *listening* lesson may be easily incorporated into this strategy by merely asking students to listen for a certain specific and, after the reading, asking them for the specific.

Finally, by the teacher's reading to the class, an example is set not only in how the written word should sound when used expressively aloud, but also one wherein the adult teacher is seen to place *value on reading* stories. This latter is transferred to the students, improving their attitude toward novels and reading in general.

How does being read to increase a child's writing ability? Quite simply and literally, it tunes his ear to the way written language sounds. The more good writing a child hears, the more he is apt to emulate it in his own writing. The more he is read to, the more his mental ear begins to hear words, expressions, and words in combination as they are used by writers. When the student writes, these then find their way into his written expression, thereby improving it in both clarity and eloquence. We cannot expect a child to write well if he has never experienced good writing to emulate.

Objectives:

General:

1. To develop an awareness and appreciation of the characteristics of the novel form, and as a result, of the artistry of well-written literature.

2. To recognize various categorizations of the novel: gothic, fantasy, science fiction, western, romance, social commentary, historical and thematic subjects, etc. in both escape and interpretive literature.

3. To become familiar with several novels of quality which might not ordinarily be read in the course of the English program.

4. To experience the pleasure inherent in the free reading of quality novels.

Specific:

1. To read (orally by the teacher and possibly by some students) several novels.

2. To discuss the novels during and after the reading to develop recall, vocabulary, comprehension and listening skills.

3. To illustrate novel characteristics and form.

4. To read individually in class several types of novels of the student's own selection (in consultation with the course supervisor.)

5. To illustrate in oral (or written) form an appreciation of the novel consistent with the student's mental maturity.

Scope & Sequence:

A. It is suggested that the course begin with the teacher's reading aloud the introductory passages from several selections, ie. Who Has Seen The Wind (Mitchell), The Hobbit (Tolkien), The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe (Lewis), and allowing the class to vote on the first selection to be read aloud in total. The other selections would be returned to the library for individuals to select for their independent reading if their curiosity had been aroused by the opening passages.

or

The teacher might elect to read the first novel aloud, ie. Who Has Seen The Wind, without eliciting student preference until selecting later novels in the course.

B. During the second or third week of the program, one period would be devoted to a selection from library resources or elsewhere of titles for independent reading. A library visit might be scheduled approximately once every three weeks for this purpose.

C. Discussion of the novel read aloud by the teacher would be on-going. Oral reports by the students would occur as they finish their independently read novels - suggest one or two five minute reports each period to begin as soon as the first students were ready.

D. Occassional periods might also be devoted to silent reading of independent novels only and/or to preparing oral reports as the teacher and class might desire.

References:

Bach, Richard, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, read aloud on record by Richard Harris.

Gee, T. ed. *Read Aloud Stories: An Annotation Bibliography*, Regional Office of Education, Grande Prairie, 1976.

Evaluation:

Considering the student for which this option is designed, and the express purpose of the option to have the student experience the pleasure inherent in reading, evaluation should probably take the form of teacher assessment of individual involvement and interest, class participation, contribution to discussion, sincerity of oral reports, etc. and not emphasize or possibly even utilize, written test instruments.

Footnotes:

1. Teacher-developed units on these subjects, in varying degrees of specificity, are available from the Grande Prairie Regional Office of Education.

2. Major emphasis in this course should be on student writing, the quality and form of that writing, and not on the study of the writings of others. These should only be used for illustration.

3. Eliciting class discussion on such topics is frequently facilitated by the teacher's telling of similar experiences from his/her childhood first.

   Regrouping the class into small units of 3 or 4 students to recount experiences for ten or fifteen minutes will also promote discussion.

4. Teachers may want to consider these separately over several lessons at junior high level. Also, they may find that short deductive lessons for some groups on sequencing, the five senses, conflict, point of view, and/or tense are needed. If so, these should not be extensive; nor should they be introduced to students who are not experiencing problems in these areas despite the fact they may not recognize the terms.

   The teacher will also find that these four areas are those to look for in commenting on the writing assignments when they are submitted initially. To these might be added usage conventions, poetics, etc.